

Common Core in California Schools

Preparing Kids for their Future



Local districts and teachers across California have been working since 2010 to implement the Common Core State Standards in their classrooms, and this spring they will administer a new student achievement test called the Smarter Balanced Assessments. The Common Core standards in English language arts and math set higher expectations for students, aiming to successfully engage them in deeper learning skills and expose them to new opportunities and approaches to learning.

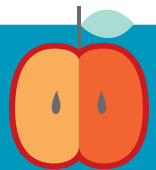
An updated and better approach to learning

Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which higher education and the workforce are demanding higher-level skills than ever before. To ensure all students are ready for success after high school, the Common Core State Standards establish a set of learning goals that work grade-by-grade, step-by-step, to prepare them to meet challenges they will face both in college and career. Students benefit from this approach through a greater use of analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills.

The standards are in line with the skills that all students need to become 21st century learners. Common Core was borne from the recognition that consistent, real-world learning goals would ensure all students – regardless of where they live – graduate high school prepared for college, career, and civic life. The standards were drafted by content experts and teachers, with significant public input, and were adopted by California policymakers on a bipartisan basis in 2010. They are widely supported by a diverse and broad spectrum of stakeholders.

Common Core does not dictate specific content: it is a set of standards that sets expectations for what students should know at each grade level, like being able to count to 100 in kindergarten. It is up to local teachers and school leaders to decide how to help their students reach those goals.

Why so many support Common Core



There is strong consensus among California leaders from higher education, business and industry, K-12 education, parent groups, teacher associations, community-based organizations, the equity community, and state and local policymakers in support of Common Core. They know its rigorous expectations will help boost achievement for all students and increase their likelihood of success as college students, employees, parents, and community members.

Under Common Core, the days of rote learning and memorization are gone. Instead, students now learn to dissect and analyze information, think critically, and problem solve. Employers and higher education leaders have long called for a K-12 system that would advance these skills and abilities.

Why California needs Common Core

California's success depends on our ability to cultivate future leaders, innovators, and prepared citizens. Common Core is designed to address the well-documented inadequacies of the old system and ensure students are prepared to seize emerging educational and career opportunities. Consider the following statistics:

- While STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) jobs in California are projected to grow 22 percent by 2020, the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 75 percent of California's 8th graders in 2011 were not proficient in national math standards.
- Within the next decade, California will need to fill a projected gap of more than 1.5 million skilled workers that have "some college" experience. (Public Policy Institute of California, September 2014)
- California spends \$688 million per year on community college remediation for recent high school graduates who did not graduate with necessary basic skills. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2013)
- In 2012, 44 percent of freshmen entering the California State University system required remediation in English or math. (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2014)
- According to the US Chamber of Commerce, California was given a D for its international education competitiveness based on our students' math and reading proficiency compared to international benchmarks and passage rates for Advance Placement tests in foreign languages and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses.

Measuring student progress

Along with the Common Core standards comes a new testing system designed to better measure student progress. The Smarter Balanced Assessments, which all students will participate in this spring, are an important tool in ensuring students are mastering the expectations set by the Common Core standards.

The new assessments, which are administered on computers, are a significant upgrade from the previous fill-in-the-bubble tests and were specifically designed to more accurately and efficiently help educators and parents identify what students understand and where they are struggling. Because the assessments are multi-faceted and adjust based on the responses students provide, they are more individualized and better reflect what students know.

Transitioning to success

Implementing Common Core in every classroom in the state and using the Smarter Balanced Assessments to measure student progress is a significant undertaking, and challenges have been expected. None of these temporary difficulties, however, outweigh the long-term benefits of providing our students what they need to be ready for a successful future. Teachers, students, and district leaders should be provided the time and support necessary to successfully implement the standards.

The assessments will be establishing a new baseline for measuring student progress against the higher expectations of Common Core. However, the fact that early Common Core adopters like Kentucky are now seeing academic improvement across the board and achievement gaps shrinking demonstrates the benefit of setting a high bar in the classroom for all students and providing them a quality education.

Hundreds of diverse organizations and leaders throughout the state support Common Core because it is designed to benefit and enrich students by setting clear expectations that will better prepare them for the opportunities that lie beyond high school. Now it is imperative that we all work together to support Common Core implementation and help our kids succeed.



CHILDREN NOW